ABSTRACT

A cross-sectional study was conducted to identify coverage and utilization of sanitary latrines and its related factors, which consisted of socio-demographic characteristics, psycho-social factors and enabling factors of latrine construction and utilization. Data were collected from 168 households by interview using a structured questionnaire and observation of latrines with a checklist at the four villages in Nonghet district, Xiengkhuang province, Lao PDR in March 2002.

The results were as follows:
Coverage of latrine was 73% in the study villages. Utilization rate of latrines was slightly less than coverage (72% according to interview, and 70% according to observation) and even less latrines were provided with water and soap for hand washing. Among socio-demographic characteristics, gender, occupation and ethnic groups were significantly related to utilization of sanitary latrines, while age, educational level, and household size were not related. It was also found that family income was significantly different between latrine users and the others. For psycho-social factors, most of the respondents had good knowledge about fecal-oral diseases (91%) and importance of latrines (96%). In addition, more than half of them (55%) showed a positive attitude toward latrine construction and utilization. However, practically, improper behavior of hand washing was found. There was no significant difference in psycho-social factors between latrine users and the others. However, it was found that those who did not use a latrine tended to have less understanding of latrine use, less value on convenience of latrine use, less demand for latrine use among farmers, and to have negative images of a latrine, such as dirtiness or attracting flies. Among enabling factors, significant relationships were found between utilization of sanitary latrines and the following factors: availability of manpower, land, and materials for latrine construction, cost of materials, organization assistance for latrine construction, water sufficiency, availability of health volunteers, and frequency of information. It was also found that time from water source to a place of defecation was significantly different between latrine users and the others. Concerning information, it was found that among those who did not know about availability of manpower, cost of materials and organization assistance, the majority did not use a latrine (88%, 90%, and 53% respectively). Mass media and health personnel were the main sources of information among the respondents.

The study implied that there were some possibilities in improvement on sanitation fund, village health volunteers’ activity, and frequency of information. For the specific hygiene education messages, behavioral change in hand washing was the most important in the findings of the study.